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LIBERMANN – “MAN OF SUFFERINGS” *

The idea is rather wide-spread among the members of the Congregation that Libermann was miraculously cured while on pilgrimage to Loretto in 1840.

It is not exactly true, and that was not his intention in visiting the “Holy House” which pious tradition holds is the house of Mary and Joseph in which the Incarnate Word lived for thirty years of his life on earth. The pious acolyte was so accustomed to his malady that he would not have dared ask for a miraculous cure. Some years earlier, when a German Canon renowned for miracles visited Issy, Libermann refused to ask for a cure because he considered himself unworthy that a miracle be worked for his sake. If God were to cure him, he would be very happy, but “he did not want to ask for this.”¹

Libermann accepted lovingly whatever God sent him. For him health and sickness were all the same, as long as they came as a sign of God’s will. He wanted only one thing: to work for God’s glory. He certainly applied to himself the words he once wrote to one of his correspondents: *That miserable headache will not go away! Well, . . . all the better, as long as God be blessed. The pain will not keep you from giving Him glory; if it did, He would surely cure you.*²

In following his new missionary vocation, Libermann really wanted to work for God’s glory by way of evangelizing the poor slaves in Bourbon and Haiti. But, was that really the Lord’s will? – Everything, apart from his malady, seemed to indicate that it was; or should he rather follow his natural preference for solitude and total union with God by going off

* In this article I speak only of Libermann’s physical sufferings. His spiritual sufferings, which are not less by any means, could form the subject-matter of another article.

¹ *Notes et Documents* (hereafter referred to as *N.D.*), I, pp. 123-124.

² *Lettres Spirituelles*, I, p. 20 – Letter of January 26, 1830.

to a deserted place somewhere in Italy and spending the rest of his days there, since he probably would not live long anyway? In short, was "Divine Providence calling him definitively to solitude, or rather to become a priest and work among the Negroes or those destined to become fathers in faith to those poor abandoned ones? If the latter were the case, he begged that He who can do whatever He wishes . . . would remove the obstacles which, humanly speaking, barred his way."³

If Libermann was to remain at the head of the "Work for the Blacks", he absolutely had to be ordained. The reply from the Secretary of Propaganda was peremptory: *Not being a priest, I could not yet think of working at missions . . .*⁴

Later, when the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda had received more favorable information about the "converted Jew . . . particularly outstanding for his piety . . . a source of edification for the entire Seminary . . . real model of clerical virtue . . ."⁵, he wrote Libermann a letter over his own signature in which, says Libermann, *he had great praise for our zeal and said that the Congregation highly approved of our project, and personally exhorted us to do everything in our power to persevere in our vocation . . .*⁶ His Eminence concluded his letter by saying *that he prayed Almighty God to give me the health necessary to be ordained a priest and to devote myself wholly to this holy endeavor . . .*⁷

A few months later, the humble acolyte made his pilgrimage to Loretto with this intention. *Even though my health was improving, there were still serious difficulties concerning my ordination . . . I made a pilgrimage to Loretto in a state of uncertainty about our project. Just at that very time, without my knowing it, somebody spoke in my favor to one of the worthiest bishops of France and that prelate offered to ordain me.*⁸

As a matter of fact, the grace Libermann received at Loretto was not that of a miraculous cure, but rather the grace of

³ Cf. Memorandum of Fr. Tisserant, *N.D.*, II, pp. 31-33.

⁴ Letter to Dom Salier, July 9, 1840. *N.D.*, II, p. 151.

⁵ Letter of the Apostolic Inter-Nuncio in Paris, May 18, 1840. *N.D.*, II, p. 78.

⁶ Letter to M. Gamon, December 20, 1851. *N.D.*, III, p. 79.

⁷ Letter to Father Desgenettes, February 9, 1844. *N.D.*, VI, p. 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*

his priestly ordination. "When he got back from that sanctuary of Mary's generosity, the first news he heard in Rome was that a letter had been waiting for him for several days. It was from his brother in Strasbourg and began: *Bishop Raess . . . having heard of your problem concerning Holy Orders, told me that he would like to impose hands upon you himself and that he expects you to come as soon as possible so that he can confer the subdiaconate upon you . . .*"⁹

HOW DID LIBERMANN COME TO HAVE A DEVOTION TO OUR LADY OF LORETTO?

It came from a long way back, from his days in Issy. In the "Solitude" there was a "Loretto Path" and a chapel of the same name where he often prayed. Father Raymond, the Vicar-General of New Orleans, tells us: "... we often went together to the Loretto Chapel . . . He particularly liked the Loretto Chapel because, besides his devotion to the Most Blessed Sacrament, it helped him to satisfy his devotion to the Blessed Virgin."¹⁰

In his letters to students at Issy he sometimes recommended himself to Our Lady of Loretto. *Pray . . . for me to Our Lady of Loretto . . .*¹¹

So it is not surprising that while he was in Rome and faced with enormous difficulties for the realization of his project, Libermann should have thought of a pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Loretto. Inviting one of his correspondents to visit Rome, he adds: *If you were to come for the month of September, we could go on pilgrimage together to Loretto. I hope to go there during that month . . .*¹² You know, don't you, he asked another person, *that it is the house where Our Lord lived for thirty years with the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph?*¹³

Circumstances prevented him from making the pilgrimage in September as he had planned. It was not until mid-Nov-

⁹ Memorandum of Father Tisserant, *N.D.*, II, p. 32. Cf. also *N.D.*, VI, p. 41.

¹⁰ *N.D.*, I, p. 282.

¹¹ Letter of December 22, 1839, *N.D.*, I, p. 681. Cf. also p. 229.

¹² Letter to M. Cahier, July 6, 1840, *N.D.*, II, p. 138.

¹³ Letter to M. Edouard de Farch, July 6, 1842, *N.D.*, II, p. 141.

ember that he left Rome – on foot. He started back to Rome on November 30 and arrived on December 15.¹⁴ It was the year 1840.

Tisserant refers to the pilgrimage: "The trip lasted a month. During that time dear Father was able to satisfy at his leisure his heartfelt devotion to the Mother of God. Many times in that blessed place he recommended to the so generous Heart of Mary this little project and each one of those whom God's mercy destined to be members of it . . ." ¹⁵

And did he obtain his cure? I have already said that he did not. Libermann himself says: *My health is much better. It is now three years and a half since I have had an attack and even the slighter symptoms have lessened. Still, I am not cured. I still have problems with my speech and therefore I could not try to preach . . .* ¹⁶ This was written on the very day when he was ordained deacon. He was finding out that from then on he could work for God's glory while still having his infirmity which he knew was naturally incurable: *maladies coming from an organic defect of the body are never cured.* ¹⁷

We can affirm, however, that even if Libermann was not radically cured he had received from God through Mary's intercession a lessening of his greatest handicap, a remission of epileptic attacks. There had happened to him what he promised his correspondent Edouard de Farcy: *Our Lady of Loreto will do something for one of the poor children of her heart.* ¹⁸

The fact of having no more attacks was a grace from God, but it was also the fruit of Libermann's holiness which showed itself especially in his patience, his meekness, his total resignation to God's will, his constant willingness to be "useless" out of love. The very day he was ordained deacon, he wrote: *Now my desire to do something for God's glory is immense. If I should have to remain as sterile as I have been up to now, it would be a great affliction for me . . . Pray for me . . . However, if it should be God's holy will, I shall have to go that way and lovingly remain in that same state of uselessness . . .* ¹⁹

¹⁴ Cf. *N.D.*, II, pp. 226-227.

¹⁵ Memorandum of Father Tisserant, *N.D.*, II, pp. 31-33.

¹⁶ Letter to M. Cahier, August 10, 1841. *N.D.*, II, p. 493.

¹⁷ Letter to Bishop Kobès, October 21, 1849. *N.D.*, IX, p. 193.

¹⁸ Letter to M. E. de Farcy, July 6, 1840. *N.D.*, II, p. 142.

¹⁹ Letter to M. Cahier, August 10, 1841. *N.D.*, II, p. 493.

LIBERMANN'S EPILEPSY

This nervous malady was with Libermann until his death, although with different symptoms.

With respect to epilepsy: "From the clinical point of view, we can distinguish four classes of epileptic symptoms: 1) the «grand mal», 2) the «petit mal», 3) localized epilepsy, 4) symptoms close to epilepsy (e.g. abdominal seizures, some types of heart pains, somnolence attacks)."²⁰

We find these symptoms in Libermann's sickness which he always called *my nervous ailment*.

When did it begin? It is generally thought that it was when he was preparing for the subdiacenate. His biographers, relying upon the letter he wrote to Samson Libermann on July 27, 1828, say that it started in Februaury 1827, only about two months after his baptism.

Personally, I think he was an epileptic even before his conversion. In his letter to his brother he said: *My health is good. I believe my nervous ailment is decreasing. I have had no bad attack since last February . . .*²¹

Libermann's manner of speaking gives us to understand that he was referring to a latest attack, not a first one as is often thought.

In confirmation of this, we have a letter dated July 2, 1845 in which Libermann writes: *I was subject to this kind of ailment (nervous ailments) in my youth, and very severely.*²² In February 1827, Francis Libermann was twenty-five years old; he was no longer the youth his letter referred to; he was an adult. Dr. Pierre Louis Rehun in his *Encyclopédie Médicale Quillet* (p. 719) writes; "Once one has reached the age of twenty, there is hardly any need to fear falling into epilepsy. It usually comes on at the age of puberty."

What was the origin of the disease in Libermann's case? Was it hereditary? Letourneur tells us that Jacob had a cousin who was epileptic. Was it caused by an internal injury? Perhaps. The biographers generally say that it was. Everybody knows how badly his teacher treated him

²⁰ *Larousse du XX^e siècle*, for the word "epilepsy".

²¹ *N.D.*, I, p. 149.

²² Letter to Miss Barbier, July 2, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 238.

when he was a small boy, even striking his head against the wall. According to Letourneur, even one such incident would have been enough to cause internal lesions and lead to the terrible malady. "It was sufficient to leave him with organic infirmities for his whole life."²³

When did Jacob have his first seizure? We don't have enough information to say for sure. It is only from 1827 on that we can follow the account of severe attacks.

What occasioned the 1827 attack? "L'ami de la Religion", February 18, 1827, speaks of a young Jewish cleric, a recent convert. This seminarian, who seems to be Francis Libermann, attended the baptism of another Jew, thirty-three years old, who had been prepared for the sacrament by M. Drach. The ceremony caused Libermann to relive the emotions of his own conversion and baptism, his nerves became all upset, and a few hours or a few days later he had his first seizure. He was a seminarian at the time, but it did not prevent him from receiving tonsure as a cleric of Strasbourg Diocese the following June.²⁴

From that time on, we have enough data to allow us to follow the course of his sickness and to reach the conclusion that it never left him.

The second attack took place during the winter of 1828-29. He wrote on April 8, 1829: *My health is not yet entirely restored . . . ; for eighteen months my nerves had never given me any peace, but at the end of last year they really played some dreadful tricks on me . . .*²⁵

The eighteen months he mentions in this letter – beginning in February 1827 – would bring us up to August 1828. Perhaps he had an attack then and another one during the winter. That would seem to be what he implies when he uses the plural "some dreadful tricks". He confirms this calculation in his letter of July 8, 1830: *My nerves are much calmer than they were two years ago. I have not advanced to the subdiaconate, however, because my illness has not altogether left me . . .*²⁶

²³ *Cahiers Libermann*, J. Letourneur, I – Booklet I, p. 55.

²⁴ *N.D.*, I, p. 106.

²⁵ *Lettres Spirituelles*, I, p. 7.

²⁶ *Idem*, I, p. 9.

After the attacks he had during that winter of 1828-29, Libermann makes no reference to others until January 3, 1835: *My health is good. It is a year now since there have been any incidents. That does not mean that I am cured, and I don't think God wants me to be a priest. If He calls me, I belong to Him; He knows that I am ready to do whatever pleases Him.*²⁷ The most recent incident, therefore, had taken place in January 1834 or thereabouts.

On September 13, 1835 he wrote again to his eldest brother: *Don't worry about my health. God knows what He is about . . . As a matter of fact, I am about the same as I have been. There has been an interval of fourteen or fifteen months between incidents, and, after all that time, it was very light.*²⁸

According to this statement of Libermann, we can fix the violent attacks at more or less the following dates, in addition to those already mentioned: the end of 1828 or the beginning of 1829, March or April 1830, June or July 1831, August or September 1832, December 1833, February or March 1834, April or May 1835. In February 1836 he was able to write to his brother Samson: *My health is fairly good. I have had no trouble since last year. Still, don't count upon seeing me a priest some day.*²⁹

It seems that there followed a long period without any incidents. In the summer of 1837 Libermann left for Rennes to become Novice-Master for the Eudists. On December 31, 1837 he wrote: *My health has held up perfectly since I came here. I have now been without disturbances for almost three years.*³⁰

Unfortunately, he had a bad attack a month later on February 7, 1838. It seems to have been brought on by the strange conduct of Mr. de Brandt of whom Libermann complains: *. . . May Jesus and his cross fill our souls! That beloved cross weighs very heavily upon me . . . I have now been crushed under its weight for three months . . . I am referring to our very dear and very poor Mr. de Brandt. The state he has been in for more than three months really frightens me . . .*³¹

²⁷ *N.D.*, I, p. 164.

²⁸ *L.S.*, I, p. 122 and *N.D.*, I, pp. 164-165.

²⁹ *N.D.*, I, p. 166.

³⁰ *N.D.*, I, p. 366.

³¹ Letter to M. Paul Carron, *N.D.*, I, p. 496.

This seems to have been the last violent attack Libermann had. He was not cured, but from then on he was able to see attacks coming on. In his letter of November 30, 1838, in which he announced to Father Louis his imminent departure from Rennes to give himself totally to the Work for the Blacks, he writes: *I have decided to leave next Monday, – this is important and necessary. You know . . . how weak my nerves are. I am afraid that the extreme tension I am under may bring on a bad seizure. May all be done according to the good pleasure of my Lord Jesus. But I have to foresee the possibility.*³²

* * *

It would seem that the worst epileptic attacks had come to an end for Libermann. From that time on, the "grand mal" will be replaced by other symptoms: migraine headaches, intestinal disorders, etc. (even though, it is true, he also had these before . . . *as soon as I try to do a little work, "he had written as early as April 8, 1829", I get a binding sensation in my head as if my forehead and temples were held in a vice . . .*)³³

During his stay in Rome his health was not very good. We know from a letter he wrote to Father Lanurien that he had to consult a doctor. *The doctor in question is a bit of a charlatan, – as they almost all are in Rome. He prescribed tonics, antispasmodics, and something else – I don't remember the technical name – to purify the blood . . . It all amounts to a sort of horse medicine which can do some good when the sickness is receding, but it could be dangerous to place yourself in the hands of such a doctor. If you want some of these medicines, I can send you some; I still have the prescription . . .*³⁴

Libermann's illness was indeed receding. M. Galais was right when he told of his report to the Archbishop of Paris: "We told him that, as far as your illness was concerned, . . . it had been improving for several years and that you had had no incident for more than a year . . ." ³⁵

³² *L.S.*, I, p. 298.

³³ *N.D.*, I, p. 150.

³⁴ Letter of October 23, 1841. *N.D.*, III, p. 46.

³⁵ Letter from M. Galais to Libermann, February 17, 1841. *N.D.*, II, p. 397.

A year later on the same date, Libermann reported on his health in writing to his brother the doctor: *My health has been good all this time. The tablets you gave me did some good . . . I haven't any more of them . . . If I had, I would go on taking them. I had no stomach-aches this winter . . . My migraine has not been so bad. I had it only when I caught a cold in my head.*³⁶

Libermann, although he had *the bad habit of always being sick*,³⁷ did not have the habit of complaining. He was an optimist both by nature and by virtue. We can, however, follow the course of his sickness almost day to day because he often spoke about it, either in excusing himself for lateness in answering letters or in trying to make his friends stop worrying. The references to his health appear almost like an "antiphon"³⁸ at the beginning of his letters.

Let us follow these references through the most trying times of his life, for suffering was the very fabric of his wonderful existence.

On July 6 he wrote again to his brother Samson and gave a report on the intestinal disorders which had been troubling him for some time. *I have hardly gotten over the diarrhoea and bit of dysentery I had at the end of Lent. There is still something wrong in my intestines. Every morning I am bothered two or three times between 5 : 30 and 6 : 30; i.e. during the hour after I get up. Then I say Holy Mass and, after I have taken the ablutions, I am all right almost all day . . . It is better since I have begun to drink wine at table instead of beer. I believe it is more a matter of nerves than anything else . . . I have migraine from time to time, but it does not last very long and then I am all right. I have a poor old body . . .*

Then Libermann goes on to tell his brother what diet he is following, to see if the doctor approves, *As for food, here is what agrees with me best, – in the morning, some bread and water; I think that's best for me, – milk or chocolate turn sour in my stomach . . . with bread and water I have no problems. In this case mortification seems to be good for my body. At noon, some soup, some boiled meat with vegetables and a bit of fruit,*

³⁶ Letter to Samson, February 17, 1842. *N.D.*, III, p. 150.

³⁷ Letter to M. de Goy, June 23, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, p. 241.

³⁸ Cf., for example, *N.D.*, VII, p. 338: "I shall begin by giving you my usual excuses . . . that is ordinarily the first verse of my song . . ."

*water with one-third wine in it. For some time I have been using a powder they use for making seltzer. In the evening, some vegetables with salad in summer and soup in winter, and some fruit. The doctor wanted me to eat roast meat at noon; up to now I have not followed his advice.*³⁹

He is gaining confidence regarding his nervous ailment. He was speaking more easily and even tried to preach. *I preached in your Church, which was filled to the doors*, he wrote to M. Blanpin on March 19, 1843. *I had to promise your mother that I would come back and preach the Way of the Cross.*⁴⁰

At the end of the year 1843 he spoke of a *crushing migraine headache which finally left me.*⁴¹ But he continued to be optimistic. Just read this beautiful passage, full of good humor, which he wrote to Miss Guillarme: *Don't worry about my health; it is very good. The frequent walks I have to take in the mud, although sometimes a bit tiring, build me up and do me good. It is a rather hard remedy for a lazy fellow who would rather stay quiet in his shell – but what can I do? Still, we must not neglect the poor body. If it has to pay a little, so much the better; it is good to make it pay back for what we do for it. The bottle M. Tisserant gave me helped my stomach a lot. For a long time I just looked at it, – even that helped. It is better to go slowly in taking medicine. Later on, I took some of it everytime I didn't feel well . . .*

Are you satisfied with me now?

*I would not like to have to be always within your reach. You would pester me too much about my poor body. Don't you know that when you defend it you are acting as the devil's advocate? . . . It is good for it to have some discomfort from time to time to make it less proud. However, I can assure you that, apart from migraine, I am very well, and I have even found a medicine to take for migraine . . .*⁴²

In a postscript to a letter written the following March 8, he tells what this medicine is: *a cup of very bitter coffee rids me of it right away. In two minutes it's all gone.*⁴³

³⁹ Letter of July 6, 1842. *N.D.*, III, pp. 218-219.

⁴⁰ *N.D.*, IV, p. 153.

⁴¹ Letter to Mrs. Blanpin, December 31, 1843. *N.D.*, IV, p. 475.

⁴² Letter of January 23, 1844. *N.D.*, VI, p. 20.

⁴³ Letter of March 8, 1844. *N.D.*, VI, p. 104.

"THE OIL STAIN"

Sickness and excessive work caused him to get behind in his correspondence. *I received both your letters . . . I am greatly to blame for not answering sooner. Still, I am not as guilty as one might think . . . I was sick and could not work for eight days. Then I was so loaded down with things to do that had accumulated and still kept coming in. I am sure that all these excuses will make you be indulgent with me, so I depend upon your charity "quae omnia suffert."*⁴⁴

*Don't be angry with me for letting you go so long without an answer. I received your letter about five weeks ago . . . and, since then, I have been having a miserable time with neuralgia and complete loss of appetite . . . I am better now; . . . but, while I was so sick, I neglected everything because I was not able to do any serious work.*⁴⁵

*While I was writing to you, I got a miserable migraine . . . I had to rest and do nothing for at least thirty-six hours, so I am late again . . . You'll just have to blame my migraine . . . It seems as if God wants to replace my nervous ailment with migraine, because, the more frequently I have migraine, the more the nervous ailment recedes . . .*⁴⁶

Eight days later he wrote: *I beg you to excuse my lateness in writing to you. I have been so miserable for some weeks that I have not been able to get all my work done . . . The day is so short and I am so often interrupted that I never seem to catch up! I have written this little note⁴⁷ only by beginning it three different times . . .*⁴⁸

Libermann's spiritual sons saw that his health was deteriorating from day to day. A group of them was about to leave for Guinea and another group for Australia.⁴⁹ They got together and presented him with a rule which he was to follow faithfully. *Our men held a meeting some time ago and de-*

⁴⁴ Letter to M. Ducournau, August 24, 1844. *N.D.*, VI, p. 324.

⁴⁵ Letter to M. Collin, January 29, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 39.

⁴⁶ Letter to the Community of Bourbon, April 8, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, pp. 125-126.

⁴⁷ A short letter which does not take up more than a page in *N.D.*

⁴⁸ Letter to Mrs. Blanpin, April 21, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 152.

⁴⁹ Letter to M. Collin, November 27, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 402.

*cided, among other things, that I must get as much sleep as the other members of the community.*⁵⁰

As far as food was concerned, the doctor *had often ordered a diet for him altogether different from that of the community*,⁵¹ but he was very devoted to that virtue of community life which makes us do like everybody else. He probably recalled what he had written from Rennes to M. Telles, the Bursar at Issy Seminary on January 4, 1838: *My health is very good. I am no more delicate here than I was at Issy. You spoiled me there. Here I have beans, smoked bacon, cabbage, codfish, etc., instead of the boiled eggs I bankrupted your house with. My miserable stomach is never so contented as when it contains something solid and respectable. Community life attracts all sorts of graces to us. God has given me the grace of being able to do like everybody else. None of the food disagrees with me, I digest it all as easily as I digested my boiled eggs at Issy.*⁵²

Now the situation was quite different, but Libermann's frame of mind was the same. It cost him a lot to be different from the community. In his eyes it was a scandal. All the same, he realized that he had to obey the doctor. *The doctor had often ordered this diet, but I could not bring myself to live delicately and in a different manner from the other members of the community. I believe that I have to obey all that my confreres demanded concerning my person, and I am faithful to it. It costs me a lot. This kind of example given by a superior will have a bad effect sooner or later. May God be blessed in everything! This seems to me to be His Holy Will...*⁵³

He was to follow this rule as simply as a child, even though he was constantly tempted to stay up at night and get up to date with his work.

*It is striking ten o'clock. I must go to bed. Otherwise I shall be lacking in obedience... I must go to bed no later than ten o'clock...*⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Letter to the Community of Bourbon, September 6, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 291.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Letter to M. Telles, January 4, 1838. *N.D.*, I, p. 375.

⁵³ Letter to the Community of Bourbon, September 6, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 291.

⁵⁴ Letter to M. Bessieux, October 28, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 346.

Several times Libermann refers to the "regime" he is following. Here is a delightful passage: *We have three cows, a horse, some pigs, hens, ducks, geese, turkeys, pigeons. All these are for the use of the house. Our food is exactly the same as when you were here. I am the only one who lives delicately. They are fattening me up like one of the creatures I mentioned above and which I don't want to name for fear of shocking you.*⁵⁵

Thanks to his diet and a little more sleep at night, Libermann's health improved a bit. But his work demanded attention. *For some time I have been loaded down with urgent business. I have been obliged to be away for fairly long periods. I have to look after the novitiate. I often have migraine which makes me unable to work . . .*⁵⁶

He had to *hear the confessions of twenty novices and take them on direction, give retreats, keep up my correspondence, as well as take care of other necessary business. Then there are the letters which come in while I am away, the affairs of the house – not a small item: there are forty people in the house; last year there was the new building. In addition, there are all the things I have to do for Guinea, Haiti and Australia, missions that have to be organized. There are memoranda for the Ministry, memoranda for Propaganda, with the letters which must precede and follow them. Things went badly in Haiti. I had to begin negotiations in Belgium, – more information, memoranda and long letters. It all falls upon me, because I have no secretary . . . Add to that my dear migraine which must be very fond of my company because last year up until vacation time it visited me very often. To do my work, in addition to the trips I have to make to Amiens from time to time, I have only very limited time. Sometimes I cannot get up in the morning because of migraine, and I am forbidden to stay up at night. Take out the time for meditation, Holy Mass and the Breviary, and I have only six hours left at most . . .*

I still must get to work on your rule so as not to forget the things that have to be added to it, – then I can touch it up later. I have to write a work which will include a commentary and treat of the virtues and conduct of a true missionary, as well as instruc-

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁵⁶ Letter to M. Ducournau, November 7, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 378.

tions for superiors and functionaries concerning the administration of the Institute. I have to draw up a rule for the Brothers. None of this has even been begun, except for the rule for the Brothers which is the most urgent . . . Well, dear Brother, are you still annoyed with me?⁵⁷

It is worthwhile to note Libermann's spirit of docility in the postscript to his letter of December 14, 1845.

*P.S. The oil stain must not lead you to think that I wrote this letter during the night. Don't accuse me of being unfaithful. The good Brother had left a drop of oil on the stove. Without noticing, I put my letter there to dry, – but, mind you, it was at six o'clock in the morning!*⁵⁸

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One of the symptoms of epilepsy is drowsiness. Libermann suffered from this also. At the beginning of February 1846 he wrote: . . . *a bad migraine laid me low for five days; I was good for nothing but sleeping* . . .⁵⁹

The migraines continued. Libermann speaks of his "faithful companion" again on March 20, 1846: *The only reason for my tardiness is my bad migraine which has not left me alone for a minute since the day after I got back from Paris (March 2?) . . . ; when this faithful companion is here, it makes me scarcely able to think . . . May God be blessed! . . .*⁶⁰

Towards the end of May 1846, Libermann left La Neuville to go to Rome. Before getting on the ship, he made a tour of several of the dioceses of France. During this time his health was not good. In fact, he wrote from Saint-Dié on June 4: *I was ill in Paris, again in Strasbourg and in Saint-Dié; to put it briefly, the first two weeks have not been famous as far as my health is concerned. Since my visit to Lyons I have been fine. I think I shall be all right now . . .*⁶¹

⁵⁷ Letter to M. Collin, November 27, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, pp. 401-402.

⁵⁸ Letter to his nephew Francis Libermann, December 14, 1845. *N.D.*, VII, p. 420.

⁵⁹ Letter to Sister Aloysia, February 9, 1846. *N.D.*, Appendix to Vol. XIII, p. XI.

⁶⁰ Letter to Mother Javouhey, Marcy 20, 1846. *N.D.*, VIII, p. 80.

⁶¹ Letter to M. Schwindenhammer, June 1, 1846. *N.D.*, VIII, p. 167.

He was wrong. Three days later he was sick again: *I stopped in Saint-Dié . . . The devil did his best to prevent me from talking to the seminarians. I had a raging fever along with a bad headache and dizziness. In spite of this, I managed to spend half an hour talking to the assembled seminarians . . .*⁶²

When he arrived in Rome he paid tribute to the heat, as he wrote to his brother Samson: *I have owed you some news for a long time . . . With the best will in the world, I was obliged to keep quiet.*⁶³

The cause of his silence was not so much sickness as an overload of work. *I paid tribute to the heat when I arrived here. I was ill for six days without being able to go out or to do anything.*⁶⁴

When he was feeling better, he got down to work on his memorandum about the Mission.

*I was so occupied with working on the memorandum (36 enormous pages in-folio) that I could not get anything else done during that time. Our good Mother certainly helped me because I finished it without being sick. I had counted upon that help . . .*⁶⁵ And he adds: *Things are going very well; I feel much better than I did at La Neuville.*

Libermann had hardly written these lines when his "faithful companion" visited him: *Since yesterday . . . I've had migraine. . . This migraine, if it follows its usual plan, will leave me tomorrow. I really can't complain, – it's more than three months since it visited me, and even this time it is of the milder sort which usually does not last more than two days.*⁶⁶

When he got back from Rome, Libermann was in good form, – so much so that his niece Pauline (Sister St. Leopold) was able to write to her father: "Uncle arrived last Saturday, September 26. He came to see us on Sunday . . . The trip seems to have done him a lot of good, because I have never seen him look so well . . . It seems he was very well received by the Holy Father . . ." ⁶⁷

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶³ *N.D.*, VIII, p. 186.

⁶⁴ Letter to his nieces, Rome, August 2, 1846. *N.D.*, VIII, p. 198.

⁶⁵ Letter to M. Schwindenhammer, July 28, 1846. *N.D.*, VIII, p. 195.

⁶⁶ Letter to Samson, *N.D.*, VIII, p. 186.

⁶⁷ Letter to Sister Saint-Léopold (Pauline). *Compléments (N.D.)*, p. 77.

One month later he was sick again. *My silence*, he wrote to M. Poupart on October 22, 1846, *is not due to lack of good will, but rather to an overload of work awaiting me on all sides and the miserable migraine which takes delight in causing me trouble . . .*⁶⁸

The following December was almost completely a month of suffering. On the 8th he started to write a letter to the Superior of the Ladies of the Immaculate Conception of Castres. When he had finished two pages, he stopped: *My letter was interrupted at this point by an illness which made me go to bed.*⁶⁹ He continued the letter of the 27th.

LIBERMANN'S HEALTH IN 1847 AND 1848

On May 18 he wrote to M. Dat: *I just had a bad attack which lasted eight to ten days. I don't know whether it was my dear migraine or some other friend which resembles it. The fact is that it hit me hard. I am still very weak and unable to work.*⁷⁰

About two weeks later, on June 7, 1847 he wrote to Bishop Truffet: *I wanted to send you the text I had promised you, but I have been so afflicted by bodily miseries since you left that it was physically impossible.*⁷¹

He had practically abandoned his special diet. He recognized that this was wrong in a letter to Father Collin: *The migraines are also . . . my own fault. I abandoned the diet they prescribed for me. It hurt me to make distinctions at table, to have delicate food for myself while the confreres ate the common food, to drink Bordeaux wine while the others drank Picardy beer or a glass of three-quarters water and one-quarter wine. So I went back to just about the same as everybody else. I did wrong . . . now I am on a very nourishing diet which will build me up. I even eat mutton and pigeon on Friday and Saturday. I am beginning to feel better and I hope the migraine will not be so bad. Then I shall be at your service.*⁷²

⁶⁸ *N.D.*, VIII, p. 323.

⁶⁹ Letter of December 8, 1846. *N.D.*, VIII, pp. 382 and 384.

⁷⁰ Letter to M. Dat, May 18, 1847. *N.D.*, IX, pp. 144-145.

⁷¹ *N.D.*, XI, p. 168.

⁷² Letter of June 30, 1847. *N.D.*, IX, pp. 219-220.

However, the cause of these illnesses was not only his cheating on the diet, but also his excessive work. In the same letter we find: *You can't imagine . . . how much I suffer from overwork: I have to look after all kinds of business all by myself and I am not equal to it . . . For the past two or three months I have had migraine so often because of staying up at night and keeping so constantly at work that I am ill literally half the time. These migraines are my own fault too . . .*

They became more frequent as time went on. *You are kind to be satisfied with short letters*, he wrote to Father Lambert on August 20, 1847. *I need people to have a bit of compassion for my misery . . . I cannot give enough help to everybody, especially with my frequent migraines. They tell me that I should get over them in three or four years, but, for the present, I have to put up with them and sometimes they keep me from working altogether for half week or more, and make me work only sporadically the rest of the time.*⁷³

*My migraines have become very frequent and cause me a lot of trouble, because they prevent me from writing for long periods at a stretch.*⁷⁴

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* * *

The year 1848 was to be no better than the previous one. The migraine may have been less severe, but there were other miseries. He followed a diet which did him some good, but he needed more sleep than he managed to get. *I think that the diet I am following does me good*, he wrote to his brother the doctor on February 1, 1848. *I have to take medicine for my stomach and to build up my strenght so that I can do my work. I don't eat very much, but what I take is substantial. I drink wine with seltzer water . . .*

My work tires me very much. This tiredness first affects my head and then my stomach. I can take care of some serious business without bad effect, – but there are two situations which give me great trouble: 1) a diversity of things to do and constant interruptions; 2) the multiplicity of things which have to be taken care of quickly . . . Two or three years from now I shall be able to get

⁷³ *N.D.*, IX, p. 256.

⁷⁴ Letter to M. Briot, August 2, 1847. *N.D.*, IX, p. 245.

rid of all the little tasks which interrupt me at my work and make me always seem to be in a hurry . . .

"Just now, I have no relief, I am like a poor galley-slave who has to keep his nose to the grind-stone as well as he can."⁷⁵

This burden of many things to do amid constant interruptions was his lot every moment. On May 27 he wrote to Father Briot: *I am so ceaselessly harassed that I can't put enough continuity into my letters. You can see from this specimen how disorder reigns, – and this must be the sixth time I have taken up my pen to write it.*⁷⁶

His migraine was not so bad, but his stomach was always giving him trouble. *My health is good*, he wrote again to his brother Samson in July 1848, *my migraine has lessened considerably. I have to be careful of my stomach. I think I have noticed that kirsch does me good. I take some after meals if I notice a stomach-ache coming on . . .*⁷⁷

He wrote to Father Arragon on or about July 25: *I was just taken ill suddenly and the doctor forbids me to do anything . . .*⁷⁸ On August 8 Father Lanurien tells us: *Father Superior is always laden down with work. Today he is very hoarse; I'm afraid he has a touch of the flu.*⁷⁹

"I CAN'T HAVE MUCH LONGER TO LIVE"

After the fusion of the two congregations, Libermann moved to Paris. On February 1 he wrote to his niece Pauline: *It was hard for me to wait so long to answer your letter of January 20 . . . ; But a pitiless migraine has kept me from writing for three days. It is the first migraine I have had in Paris.*⁸⁰

In a letter to Father Le Vavasseur on May 10, 1849 Father Lanurien talks about Libermann's grave illness: *Father Superior is still indisposed. He has just had a pretty grave illness. I think it was a pernicious fever. He is convalescing now, and*

⁷⁵ Letter to Dr. Libermann, February 1, 1848. *N.D.*, X, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁶ *N.D.*, X, p. 202.

⁷⁷ *N.D.*, Compléments, p. 111.

⁷⁸ Letter to M. Arragon, *N.D.*, X, p. 275.

⁷⁹ *N.D.*, X, p. 283.

⁸⁰ *N.D.*, XI, p. 26.

yesterday he left for a trip. He will go to a house near Angers where he hopes to recuperate for a few days.⁸¹

Libermann himself spoke of this illness several times as "long and painful", "grave and painful", "hard".⁸² According to him, *it started with a pernicious fever. Since then, he says, I have had a recurrence of very violent stomach-pains on the side where the liver is . . .*⁸³

He wrote that on June 13. It was really a beginning of the trouble, because that illness was to last almost until the end of the year.

He did not improve much during his stay in Angers, "the time of convalescence had not come yet",⁸⁴ *The very day I left Tours, he wrote to his brother, I was seized by stomach pains which left me during the morning. I still thought it better to return to Paris . . .*

I arrived in Paris on the Eve of Pentecost . . . the next afternoon I had to go to bed for ten days, again with pains in my stomach, liver and parts of my back. Then I got some better . . .

*I left again and went to Basse-Normandie to the home of the parents of one of our confreres . . .*⁸⁵ *. . . Mr. Le Vavas seur (Léon), where they are taking very good care of me. I have been here now a little more than a week and have had no fever for six days. My stomach is gradually improving and I can say that I am better . . .*⁸⁶

As soon as he was some better, he left Lande de Longé for Bayeux. *There I had another relapse at Bayeux Seminary . . .*⁸⁷ *a relapse worse than the preceding ones . . . This time I suffered a lot: endless vomiting which frightened me very much. They finally stopped it with ice cream – they made me eat fifty pounds of it in six days. I had to follow a very rigorous diet for two weeks, then take veal broth for three days, then weak soups for three more days. Only after three weeks would they*

⁸¹ *N.D.*, Compléments, p. 126.

⁸² *N.D.*, XI, pp. 159, 144, 129.

⁸³ Letter to Bishops Bessieux and Kobès, June 13, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 129.

⁸⁴ Letter to Dr. Libermann, June 12, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 126.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Lettres to Bishops Bessieux and Kobès, June 13, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 129.

⁸⁷ Letter to Fr. Le Vavas seur, June 20, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 134.

*let me have a little bit of fish once a day. You can imagine how weak I was. Finally they sent me to Arromanches to recuperate at the seaside . . .*⁸⁸

*The days . . . at the seaside gave me back some strength. I could go for walks, even do a little work, so at last I thought I could go back to Paris . . . ; But I little dreamed that God would want me back in bed as soon as I arrived.*⁸⁹

That's what happened, and that's what prompted Libermann to begin his letter to Bishop Kobès by saying: *I am always sick! . . . May God's Holy Will be done!*⁹⁰

On August 12 Libermann left for Strasbourg to convalesce, as he had told Bishop Kobès the day before. On the 14th, during the trip, he wrote to Father Lanurien from Nancy: *I arrived in Nancy in excellent health. I think I am almost cured. This evening we are to leave for Charmes where we shall spend the Feast of the Assumption.*⁹¹

He wrote to his brother Samson on the 16th: *Charmes, August 16, 1849. You will be surprised to get a letter from me from the Vosges. I am on my way to visit you . . . The doctors told me to go and take a holiday in my native country. I am almost all better. Tomorrow morning I go to Saint-Dié . . . I hope to spend a day there and continue on to Strasbourg on Saturday.*⁹²

Three times Libermann returned to Paris thinking he was cured and three times he fell sick again. He says himself: *I came back three times and all three times I was stricken within a day or so with stomach-pains and vomiting . . . The doctor sent me away from Paris three times for fear my illness might degenerate into cholera as was happening in the case of almost all illnesses . . .*⁹³

His convalescence took a long time, as he wrote on October 2, 1849: *I have only been well again for a few days.*⁹⁴ He wrote to his fellow-Alsatian, Bishop Kobès: *And it was Alsace that put me back on my feet . . .*⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Letter to Fr. Le Vasseur, June 27, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 1389.

⁸⁹ Letter to Bishop Kobès, August 11, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 149.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *N.D.*, XI, p. 152.

⁹² *Idem*, p. 154.

⁹³ Letter to M. Lossadat, February 2, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, pp. 53-54.

⁹⁴ Letter to M. Faveau, *N.D.*, XI, p. 159.

⁹⁵ Letter to Bishop Kobès, October 11, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 174.

On March 11, 1849 he wrote to Father Blanpin: *I am still among the living . . . My malady is basically cured, I think . . . So I am cured, but this sickness has left me with a certain upset which I suppose is nervous. It makes it hard for me to go on foot to do messages in Paris or to write. It is quite a task for me to write a letter . . .*⁹⁶

This illness left a deep mark upon Libermann. Father Lanurien says so in a letter of May 10, 1849 to Father Le Vavas seur: "To mention Father Superior again: this illness . . . has had a deep effect upon him. He was afraid he was going to die; . . . doubly so, he told me, because of natural fear of death, but most of all because he dreaded to leave us orphans . . ." ⁹⁷

Almost at the beginning of his illness, Libermann himself had written to Le Vavas seur inviting him to come to Paris and help him in the administration of the Congregation: *My physical constitution is so weak that I doubt if I can have much longer to live and we need you. Later he continues: During my illness, I had some very bad moments when I needed to talk to you. I was, or thought I was, in danger. All the time I could not get you out of my mind for an instant. How it would have consoled me if you could have been there with me! I can tell you that it upset me to find myself at the point of death and the Congregation abandoned.*⁹⁸

*Everything suffered during that illness of mine,*¹⁰⁰ he wrote to the Prefect Apostolic of Pondichery, – even at Holy Ghost Seminary, about which he wrote to Father Le Vavas seur: *We have had some serious trouble with the seminarians. My sickness did not help any; I was obliged to be away from the Seminary all during that time.*¹⁰¹

It also caused trouble in the business of the Colonies: *That illness was a source of great affliction to me. I saw our poor Colonies in the sad state in which they still are, and there was nothing I could do . . .*¹⁰²

⁹⁶ *N.D.*, XII, p. 117.

⁹⁷ *N.D.*, Compléments, p. 127.

⁹⁸ Letter to Fr. Le Vavas seur, June 20, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 133.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to the Prefect Apostolic of Pondichery, January 15, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, p. 10.

¹⁰¹ Letter to Fr. Le Vavas seur, October 26, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 210.

¹⁰² Letter to M. Faveau, October 2, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 160.

While he was sick, Libermann's work, put off from one day to another, accumulated for almost six months. As soon as he gained back a little strength, he went to work at it, – with all the zeal he was capable of. On October 26 he wrote to Father Le Vavasseur: *You know that I have been sick and was unable to do anything from April to October. Since the first of October, however, I am back on the job. The load of work is more crushing than ever . . . I need to be very careful, but unfortunately I cannot, I overwork my strength. I don't think that I can hold up much longer under the enormous burden placed upon me. However, I am better in the winter. I shall keep going, I hope.*¹⁰³

After so long a silence on my part, he wrote to one of his missionaries, you have the right to get a long letter; but if you knew how much time I have available to write to you, you would be happy with this little note!

My long delay in writing is due, first of all, to the many duties I had at the beginning of last year in connection with the union of the two congregations. Then there was my long illness . . . ; Then all the many things that happened and finally a welter of extraordinary business I have had to deal with since I came back.

*So, there are my excuses. Shall I manage to be more faithful in the future? I shall do all I can.*¹⁰⁴

He gives a report of his work to Dr. Samson: *I am astonished at how well my health is holding up, given all the work that has come my way since last October. I began by making up for all I missed during the five months I was ill and righting the many things that had gone wrong. That had not yet been done when the ecclesiastical affairs of the Colonies had to be dealt with. Then there was the matter of the Chateau which I spoke to you about, and another very serious matter. All that, combined with the day-to-day business and the departure of our missionaries, kept me from having a minute to breathe . . .*¹⁰⁵

My health is holding up under this galley-slave work, Libermann wrote to Father Le Vavasseur on December 28, 1849. I have never worked as hard as I have had to do these

¹⁰³ *N.D.*, XI, p. 208.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to M. Marie Bouchet, November-December 1849. *N.D.*, XI, p. 268.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Dr. Samson, December 28, 1849. *N.D.*, XI, pp. 315-316.

*past two months. I have not had eight days of let-up. When I have finished taking care of the general questions, I shall have a little more rest, but even the current business is enough to occupy a poor fellow like me.*¹⁰⁶

Libermann realized the danger he was running of falling sick again and because of that he insisted that Le Vavas seur come and join him, to help him and, if necessary, to replace him.

*... I need to have you with me, especially now that the Congregation's works are expanding. If I were to fall ill again, I have nobody here who could fully replace me... pour man though I be...; the others do not have the same advantages and they lack experience in business matters... Only you seem to me to be the man God has destined for this work. It would also be a good thing for you to be here in case I die. Nevertheless, I must say, to calm you down, that my illness did not leave any after-effects. It can come back, but it is not necessarily a fatal illness. My liver was affected, and that could be alarming, but not dangerous.*¹⁰⁷

But, his illness had left after-effects. He recognizes this in the letter to Father Blanpin on March 11, 1850 which we mentioned above.

*I can't get down to work for two or three hours after the mid-day meal. This is a great cross for me. The rest of the time, and for the rest of the work, I get on marvellously. I have adopted the method of dictating to M. François everything I have to write, and I have had an enormous amount of it since I got better. The only letters I write myself are the confidential ones.*¹⁰⁸

What Libermann had feared might happen, did happen. The excess work made him fall sick again. M. François speaks of it in his letter to Father Schwindenhammer on April 14, 1850: "Father Superior is ill; he has had a fever for several days. We hope it will get better soon; it is not very high, but continuous."¹⁰⁹

Libermann calls it **Guinea fever**: *Your Guinea fever, he wrote to Bishop Kobès, even reaches here and it has held onto me for two weeks. I am happy to be able to share it with you.*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ *N.D.*, XI, p. 324.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *N.D.*, XII, p. 117.

¹⁰⁹ *N.D.*, XII, p. 153.

¹¹⁰ *N.D.*, XII, p. 167.

Since it was not a very high fever, he calls it a "little fever" in his letter to Sister Ste. Anne (his niece Caroline): *I was going to write you on the 5th of the month . . . ; a little fever kept me from doing so. It has not wanted to leave me, it likes being with me so much . . . Finally my fever has left me alone and I feel quite well now.*¹¹¹

This fever seems to have been a beginning again of the sickness of the year before, according to Libermann himself: *I had a slight beginning of last year's illness. Now I am fairly well.*¹¹²

At the end of June he wrote from Mons-lvry to his god-daughter Marie Libermann: *I told you I was in solitude. I came to the country house for a week or ten days to do some work and to give a little rest to my poor body which is feeling very old. This little spot is very pleasant and quiet and the air is good. I can breathe here; my health is visibly better. Still, I work doggedly for eight hours a day, four hours at a stretch in the morning and the same in the afternoon. The rest of the time is for meals, prayers, recreation and sleep. In Paris I could not work for an hour without getting tired. The good Lord took care of that, however, – I was so often distrubed that I never could get three-quarters of an hour for my work.*¹¹³

He wanted to look after his health, but the work . . . On July 29 he wrote to the same niece: *Every time I come back from a trip I find my work has tripled.*

*My health is good, you can stop worryng about that. If I could have seen my way to do so, I would have come to visit you during my holidays. But it was impossible, absolutely impossible. I am going to spend two weeks in Gard, then I shall have to come back to Paris for three weeks where there is plenty to do, but less tiring work than during the year. I am also going to do all I can to move out to our country house where the air is good and I get on fine. Then I shall return to Gard for a rest until the first days of October when the Seminary is due to re-open.*¹¹⁴

In spite of all his infirmities, Libermann considers himself fortunate when he makes comparison with the way he was

¹¹¹ Letter to Sister Sainte-Agnes, April 27, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, p. 171.

¹¹² Letter from Libermann to his sister-in-law Julia Libermann, May 27, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, p. 297.

¹¹³ Letter of June 24, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, p. 244.

¹¹⁴ *N.D.*, XII, p. 327.

the year before: *Last year was very hard on my poor body. The Lord has been pleased to take pity on it this year. I have had no serious sickness and my lesser miseries have been less frequent.*¹¹⁵

To keep his friends from worrying he used to repeat like a refrain: *My health is good, don't be worried* or other similar expressions.

One of Libermann's greatest annoyances was his getting behind in his correspondence, especially with his confreres. But sickness and work kept him from writing. To M. Le Berre he wrote: *It seems to have become a constant thing that every time I write to my dear confreres I have to make excuses. It's really trying that, for the past two years at least, I have not been able to write to them as often as they and I would wish.*

*It is true that during that time I have been in an unusual situation because of the union of the two communities. This left me without any leisure time for other things. Last year my illness, which came on in the spring and did not leave me until late autumn, was an insurmountable obstacle for me. Now I have the glory of being able to call myself just as African, if not more African, than you, for I have had all the African diseases: six or seven years ago I had dysentery, and last year I started off with a pernicious fever and ended up with hepatitis. I am fully recovered now, but I still tire easily and find it hard to write for a long time . . . However, even if I have to die on the spot, I shall write to all of you, – but just short letters . . .*¹¹⁶

It is now the beginning of 1851. Libermann's life continues to be that of a "galley-slave." *My letter is a bit mixed up because I have been interrupted more than twenty times. I have had this letter on my table for about eighteen days. I am well, however, and, once our Bishops have left, I shall be quiet.*¹¹⁷

Two days later, Libermann wrote to Father Thiersé, one of his missionaries on the Island of Mauritius: *I am happy to be free at last to write to you "at my leisure": that is not completely exact, as long as the Bishops of the French Colonies have not left . . . This is a sacrifice God has asked of all of us in favor of the great work of the colonial bishoprics and which has taken up*

¹¹⁵ Letter to Mrs. Arragon, October 5, 1850. *N.D.*, XII, p. 384.

¹¹⁶ Letter to M. Le Berre, 1851. *Lettres Spirituelles*, VI, pp. 687-688.

¹¹⁷ P.S. to the letter to M. Blanpin, February 20, 1851. *N.D.*, XIII, p. 40.

*all my time. The biggest part of the work is finished now and I can get down to my correspondence with the confreres. Only sickness could keep me from it, and I am feeling better and better. The Divine Goodness seems to want me to give myself fully to you . . . Many important affairs which have kept me busy during the past three years, especially the past eighteen months, because for the prior eight to ten months I was sick and convalescing, and before that I had to organize the union (of the two congregations) and revise our rules.*¹¹⁸

But his work did not diminish. On March 24 he wrote from Notre-Dame du Gard to his brother Samson: *At Gard, just as in Paris, I don't have a minute to myself.*¹¹⁹

There is a long letter (twenty pages in *Notes et Documents*) to Bishop Kobès dated April 26, 1851 from which we can draw the following observation: *I finished this letter on May 3, but I have worked on it every morning since April 26.*

In a postscript to the same letter he speaks of a great project he has on his hands: **The Instructions to Missionaries:** *P.S. Since I returned from Gard I have been busy writing the instructions to missionaries . . . I give this task two or three hours every afternoon. I am only up to about page 8 (large in-folio). It will take me a year to finish it . . .*¹²⁰

In a July 15 letter to Bishop Kobès he again mentions the instructions: *I am continuing the work I told you about in my last letter. I have almost finished the part which deals with general questions, – more than sixty pages, which I think will come to about one hundred printed pages . . .*¹²¹

The "Instructions to Missionaries" was his missionary will and testament. The end was coming near.

December 12, 1851, Libermann wrote to Father Lurat from Gard: *Since I am indisposed, I am only writing you a short note. The same indisposition has made me late in writing.* Eight lines farther on, he added: *I can't write any more, I am too tired. Tomorrow I am going back to Paris . . .*¹²²

That may be the last information Libermann left us concerning his health. From then on, the information we have

¹¹⁸ Letter of February 22, 1851. *N.D.*, XII, p. 46.

¹¹⁹ *N.D.*, XIII, p. 83.

¹²⁰ *N.D.*, XIII, p. 119.

¹²¹ *N.D.*, XIII, p. 225.

¹²² *N.D.*, XIII, p. 397.

comes from Le Vavasseur and Lanurien. The former wrote to Bishop Desprez on December 23: "Your letters have gone to our dear Father who is ill just now at Notre-Dame du Gard . . ." ¹²³

The illness took the upper hand. On January 18 Lanurien wrote to Bishop Kobès: "Our good Father is very sick . . . His brother the doctor has come from Strasbourg to see him . . ." ¹²⁴

Finally, Le Vavasseur wrote to Bishop Desprez on January 22: "Our dear Father is suffering very much and we are very worried." ¹²⁵

They had good reason to be worried. On February 2, 1852 Libermann gave up his soul to God. Thus there came about what he had seemed to prophesy: *The Divine Goodness seems to want . . . that I give myself over to you.*

God took those words of Libermann in a different way: in this world he had never been free, but always busier and busier. Only after his death could he rest, become free, give himself totally to his brethren. Libermann died relatively young. He was not yet fifty years old. Anybody who is acquainted with his life can only wonder at the immense amount of work he got done during the twenty-six years he lived within the Church. These pages give only a small sample. What was the secret of this man's extraordinary activity in the midst of so much suffering? Perhaps it was the acceptance of those very sufferings in union with the sufferings of Christ. The mystery of the cross lives on.

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¹²³ *N.D.*, Compléments, pp. 247-248.

¹²⁴ *N.D.*, Compléments, p. 176.

¹²⁵ *N.D.*, Compléments, p. 250.